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ABSTRACT

Because of the newness of the concept of multicultural education in many schools and the lack of published materials available to teachers, it becomes the responsibility of the teacher to design a program aimed at meeting the needs of their classes. Certain objectives may be achieved through reading books or stories about young people from different cultures and asking students to identify values, relate similarities to their own lives, roleplay unfamiliar situations, and evaluate the objectivity of the author. It is also the teacher's responsibility to develop lessons that are aimed at analyzing specific stereotypes. An important part of the teacher's role is to bring issues on racial differences and tensions to the classroom and discuss them professionally with the students. Another aspect of the teacher's role is that of becoming a resource person for the students; to collect, compile, and use community resources to enrich students' experiences and lives. It is important for the teacher to be a positive role model for the students by using appropriate language and behavior. (JD)

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# THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER AS A MULTICULTURAL EDUCATOR

Paper presented at a Seminar in the Faculty of Education at the University of Zimbabwe, Africa

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by

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# THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER AS A MULTICULTURAL EDUCATOR

In part one of this series of papers on teaching multicultural education in Zimbabwean schools, an extensive discussion of the nature, characteristics, manifestations, and levels of culture was made. For schools and communities to understand the importance of these four concepts and how they help in building understanding among people of different races or cultural backgrounds, a key person has to be involved. This person is the teacher and the significance of his or her role cannot be overemphasized. This article then, will deal with the role of the teacher as a multicultural educator. The topics will be divided into five areas as listed below. According to this approach, the teacher's role is to:

* plan multicultural experiences for students;
* combat stereotyped thinking among students;
* handle classroom problems professionally;
* serve as a model;
* develop a community resource list.

1. Planning Multicultural Experiences

Because of the newness of the concept of multicultural education in Zimbabwean schools, and the lack of published materials available to teachers, it then becomes the sole responsibility of the teacher to design a program which is aimed at meeting the needs of his or her particular situation. What this means in simple terms is that a program developed for students in the Chitepo District must to some degree, be different from that designed for students in the Mount

Pleasant or Mucheke school districts. The difference in the student body, the location of the school or the socioeconomic status of the students' families makes it imperative for teachers to develop programs relevant to their students.

In order to develop a meaningful multicultural program the teacher has to first determine objectives to be accomplished by the program. What does she or he want students to learn? These objectives can be grouped into the following six aspects of cognitive (knowledge) and affective (attitude) learning:

*Valuing*

Objective: Students will discuss characters in books as human beings with varied needs.

Activity: The teacher might ask students to read a book such as Cry the Beloved Country, by Alan Paton and ask students to describe the major characters' needs, feelings and behaviors, and express their feelings about these characters.

*Describing*

Objective: Students will retell a folktale that has been read or heard.

Activity: The teacher could choose a folktale from countries such as England, India, the United States or any of the African countries and let the students read before retelling the stories, which in some cases may be recorded on cassettes for discussion.

*Relating*

Objective: Students will note similarities between their lives and those of other children.

Activity: The teacher might assign students to read books or stories dealing with children in a variety of cultures and then ask them to compare their own lives with the lives of the children in the reading assignments,

*Discriminating*

Objective: Students will discuss the difference between various terms used to describe individuals and groups in the Zimbabwean society. Examples of these terms might be 'native,' 'boy,' 'nanny,' 'Kiffir,' 'white,' 'black,' 'Boer,' or 'coloured.' How do people feel about these terms? How do students feel about the terms?

*Generalizing*

Objective: Students will roleplay situations that are not necessarily familiar to them.

Activity: For role playing purposes a situation such as the one below might be created:

> John Doe, an American teenager wants to go out on his first date with a girl, Lisa Jones. What does he have to do or have? The situation can be dramatized by Joe and his family members.

*Judging*

Objective: Students will evaluate the objectivity of the author of a biography. An example would be the biography of the Prime Minister, Mr. Robert Mugabe by Smith, Simpson and Davies. Students might then be asked to compare an encyclopedia biography of say Booker T. Washington. What kinds of words do the authors use to describe Mr. Robert Mugabe or Mr. Booker T. Washington?

Obviously, the teacher will need to generate more activities for each objective.

2. Planning Lessons to Combat Stereotypes

In this role the teacher's responsibility is to develop lessons which are aimed at analyzing specific stereotypes. For the students' first experience, the teacher might choose a noncontroversial generalization: Red signals danger.

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Working in small groups, students might be asked to list as many concrete instances as possible that support this statement, such as the fact that fire-trucks or engines are red. After a few minutes, switch the focus to gathering data that negates this statement, such as the practice of giving red roses to a loved one. Below is a sequence of topics which moves from less to more controversial issues, designed to help students become aware of the dangers inherent in most generalizations.

1. Wolves are bad animals.
2. Fat people are jolly.
3. Good mothers stay home with their children.
4. Indians live in teepees and steal horses.
5. Black people are lazy and unfaithful.
6. White people are superior to blacks.

By all means, the teacher should try to focus studies on topics that are general in nature, such as music, science, education or sports. A study of African music, for example, would offer an opportunity to teach folk songs and dances from different cultures.

Students could be encouraged to bring in newspaper clippings to share, to question contemporary cultural events anywhere in the world, and to express their opinions. The teacher should help students to live by Patrick Henry's words: "I may not agree with you, but I will defend unto death your right to say it."

3. Handling Difficult Problems

If students live in communities composed of a number of racial and/or ethnic groups, the likelihood is that racial tensions surface repeatedly in housing and job discrimination. The news media might even carry articles on this.

An important part of the teacher's role is to bring these issues to the classroom, and to discuss them professionally with the students. By the time students go to school, they will have acquired some stereotypic ideas taught to them, as we saw in the first paper of this series of presentations by their parents, friends, or religious leaders. If these stereotypes are not discussed in class, they certainly will continue to strengthen and spread, supported by the teacher's silence. Racist attitudes and feelings can exist and grow in the classroom even when not consciously recognized.

In planning lessons that deal with discussion of racial or stereotype issues, it is important for the teacher to maintain the role of a moderator, facilitator, resource person and controller of the discussion. If the teacher feels uncomfortable leading controversial issue discussions, then he or she should invite some guest speakers or other teachers who feel comfortable dealing with those topics. Students have to be involved. There is no other alternative. This concept is summed up in an ancient Chinese proverb which says: "Tell me, I forget, show me, I remember, involve me, I understand."

4. Developing a Community Resource List

The fourth aspect of the teacher's role to be considered her is that which has to do with the teacher as a developer of a community resource list. A lot of excellent sources of multicultural information are always available in the teacher's own community. Sometimes organizations such as civic clubs or religious organizations or student clubs such as the Highfield High School Cultural Club compile lists of possible contacts for materials, resources or speakers. Public libraries may also already have this information compiled. The telephone directory is just as good a place as any to call around and ask international organizations which might have foreign representatives in the country. Embassy film libraries or the ministry of Education and Culture would be good offices to ask for information.

Another important resource is the university of teacher training colleges where people who have been overseas or have traveled and lived in other countries work. In some towns or cities, organizations such as The Organization of University Women or the Chamber of Commerce might have information on possible speakers or slide/talk presenters.

In the final analysis, it becomes part of the teacher's role to collect, compile, and to use and in some cases to share this list of community resources to enrich students' experiences and lives. One other thing the teacher can do is to select and use non-stereotyped text materials. This role is not easy to play, but then, no one ever said it was going to be easy. All the teacher can do is to try!

5. The Teacher as a Model

Psychologists tell us that one effective way students or children for that matter acquire education is by modeling after adults. Whether teachers like it or not, they serve as students' models. Two areas in which teachers model are in the use of appropriate language and behavior. For example, a good teacher is one who refers to people by acceptable names such as "black" instead of "Kiffer" or white South African instead of Boer. The kinds of expectations the teacher has for his/her students should always reflect a realistic evaluation of each student's abilities and should not be influenced by skin colour, tribe, or national origin.

If a teacher is fluent in another language then he/she is in a position to share that knowledge with students. Sharing stories from different cultures, too, offers a way of expanding students' horizons.

CONCLUSION

The role of the teacher as a multicultural educator cannot be empnasized enough. It is the teacher who makes things happen and it is the teacher who should dare to make a difference in students' lives. Good planning, good teach-

ing, good modeling, and good handling of multicultural problems are only a few of the qualities of a good multicultural educator.

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